Chapter 1

IRAN’S SPACE RELATIONSHIP
Iran as a nation state emerged through a series of events in a geographical area which was traditionally the cross-road of the East-West influences. The uneven distribution of mountain chains has been and continues to be the key element of the geography of Iran with its topographical variations comprising of deserts, dry lakes, alluvial plains and a series of interior basins.\(^1\) The topographical differences, the uneven distribution of rainfall, the unfavourable temperature regimes and the lack of irrigation and uneven distribution of population, have not only given Iran a disunifying heterogeneity but also socio-economic disparity.\(^2\)

Earlier, the migrants roaming around the mountain slopes and foothills in search of grazing ground, settled on the foothills and valleys which have fertile soil and

who later on developed the technology of Qanat.\(^3\) With the
supply of water through Qanats, the aboriginals started
monoculture of cereals, sugar beet, fruits, lucerne,
vegetables, tobacco and cotton. Rice was grown precisely
on the Caspian littorals. Water remained the life of Iran.
There is a Quaranic saying which is quite applicable to
Iran "we made from water every living thing".\(^4\) The
scarcity of water in the dry season, the long harsh
winters specially in the north-west and Central regions
and the untempered natural beauty has helped the
aboriginals to develop a side industry which produces the
world's best indigenously made carpet and which is a
major handicraft industry of Iran.

The crescent shape physical configuration had a
sizeable impact on its system. The soft and elegant
curves of northern and southern Iran presents a contrast
to the straight and harsh western and eastern border lines
and this contrast may be regarded as symbols of the two
main elements of the Persian mind, viz., a definite
masculine vigour and creativeness and a refined and

f.n. 1, p. 11.

MIGRATION ROUTES OF IRAN

Source: C. IRVIN CROSS ROAD OF CIVILIZATION PP. 23, 61, 81, 99, 131 And 163

Fig: 1.2
subtle delicacy in art as well as in the enjoyment of life. The physical configuration of the country is determined by the two mountain ranges which are the wings of Mt. Ararat, situated at the north-western corner of Iran. The Alburz mountain range runs parallel to the Caspian shore and the Zagros mountain runs parallel to the western border of Iran. These two mountains have stood as the Cossack of Iran, guarding the Iranian heart that is the central plateau.

The geographical location of Iran as the bridge between the east and the west makes the Iranian plateau a perennial nuclear region. The entire region of Central Iran remained isolated because the migration occurred either along the coast of the Caspian sea or along the coast of the Persian Gulf (see Fig. 1.2). There was no evidence of horizontal migration across the length and breadth of Iran. Further it is difficult to determine, to which ethnological group the original inhabitants of Iranian plateau belonged, because the migrations and invasions were a continuous phenomena since the pre-

historic times. The nature of Iran has a dual character. It is too kind towards the south west and the Caspian littorals and too harsh towards central and eastern Iran. This dual character of Iran's nature leaves a tremendous impact on the socio-economic life of the settled as well as nomads.

The interaction of the mountains with the surrounding territory of Iran is totally motivated by numerous factors. Firstly, Iran's civilisation never developed in total isolation due to its geostrategic location. Iran has been an intersection of trade routes that linked China with west, enlivened Iran from Bactria passed ancient Ecbatana now Hamadan crossing the Zagros pass descended into Mesopotamia. Another road connecting

7. C. Irving, op. cit., p. 207.
Three distinct type of migration came through the gap: the seeding migration of the Indo-Europeans, of whom the Medes and the Persian were a part; the subversive migration in which tribal groups filtered into the plateau without actually invading it (they could nevertheless, achieve dominance like the Turks but by the Abbarida); and the warrior migration like the Mongols. The most lasting mark was made by the Turkish migrants', excluding the Zhamavids, the Seljuks the Safavids and Qajars. Before they migrated from the steppes, not all of the Turkshad been pastoral nomads. In central Asia there were some compact Oasis Culture where intensive farming flourished and where a highly cultured city life developed but they were vulnerable to the herdsmen who over run them. Ideas and skill developed on these remote settled out posts no doubt became part of the cultural spore into the plateau with the Turk.

the northern part of the country in the south, what is now Kurdistan and Fars, skirting the Zagros mountain. Iran not only acquired the character of cul-de-sac but stimulated the flow of commodity from east to west and vice-versa.

Secondly, the rice, tea and timber producing fertile provinces along the southern shore of the Caspian sea and the southwestern Iran attracted the wondering nomads to settle and develop the agriculture-cum-handicraft economy. But this seldom attracted a large population due to the raids by the tribal chiefs and various invaders. Due to these military campaigns, the economic and cultural interactions became very significant. However, this did not disturb the closed system of Iran because later on the whole of Iran was brought under Shiism.


The three main routes of the Ancient world passed through Iran. The northern route, commonly known as the silk road, connected China and Central Asia with Asia Minor and Europe by passing through Ray (ancient Rhages) and Tabriz. The central route passed through Ray and the Levant, and the southern route used the waterways of the Persian Gulf and the Arabian sea. Over these routes flowed commerce and wealth. But conquerors also have used these routes and have attacked Iran from east, west, north and south. As late as the second world war, Iran was called the “bridge of victory”, over which land-lease material went to the Soviet Union. Though Iran is part of the Middle East, it cannot be separated from the life and destiny of the rest of Asia or even of Europe.

Thirdly, many a time, Iran had been under tremendous pressure by the different empires from all the corners of its territory, i.e., the Ottoman empire from West, Tsarist from North and Mughal from East. Iran, however, was able to retain its own identity. Iran's mental climate is characterised by an intense national pride - the result of a fairly homogenous national stock of an almost unbroken history of national existence extending over some 2500 years of a tradition of splendid achievement derived from Achaemenian, Sasanid and Safavid dynasties. But sometimes Iran had serious internal problems with its own tribes i.e., Azerbaijani, Bakhteyari, Kurd, Baluchis and Ujbeqs who not only threatened the nation's solidarity but tried to disintegrate it.\textsuperscript{11}

Fourthly, though the country is self-sufficient but "life in Iran is dominated above all by disparity between the nomadic people and those who are settled."\textsuperscript{12}

Interestingly enough, nomadism is comparatively recent in the long history of Iran. In ancient times there were more settled areas than in recent years. Apparently there were few nomads when Herodotus was writing Iranian History. They made up only one-tenth of the army of Xerxes. Present

\textsuperscript{11} Y. Ramajani, \textit{Iran}, New Jersey, 1972.

\textsuperscript{12} \textit{Ibid}, p. 13.
nomadic life goes back to the advance of the Arab Bedouins from the south west and the Turks and Mongols from the north east. These invaders destroyed many of the settled areas of the country and continued their way of life in the isolated mountain of Iran.

Among today's nomads, for example, the Quashqual tribe came into being in 1415 A.D. and the Bakhtyari tribe was formed in the seventeenth century. They migrate regularly between the mountains and the low lands in search of fodder for their flocks. They are governed by their leader called Khan. They have their own territory and own system of operation. They are almost self sufficient but in order to acquire few necessities, which they cannot produce, they sell or exchange their products which includes sheep, milk, butter, cheese and wood. These tribemen are more loyal to their tribes than to the central government. Their territory is confined between the mountain slopes and the piedmont.

Further, most of Iran's population is engaged in agriculture with a combination of cash crops and paddy. Apart from this, the tribals are rich with wool, meat and milk obtained from sheep and goats. These comprise about

85 per cent of Iran's population of domestic animals. Apart from the agricultural sector, Iran has carpet weaving, pottery and other domestic industries. In recent years, the oil industry has given a phenomenal boost to Iran's economic and social development.

In order to study the space location of Iran on a macro level, one has to start with a micro level analysis, keeping in view the political realm of the West Asia. Or in other words, the macro level study cannot be done as long as micro level study is not attempted. The micro level study may be analysed in three sections.14

The Zagros are composed of numerous parallel ranges stretching about 1400 kms. in length from Azerbaycejan to north east of Bandar Abbas. The ranges are of moderate elevation in the north and high in the central section and spread out again in southern Pars and Lorestan. In places the Zagros extends upto 320 kms. in width.

Springs emerge from the mountains and winter snow feeds the rivers and streams. The major rivers are the Karkeh, which rises in Kurdistan and flows into the Tigris.15

The Karun river which rises from Bakhteyari mountains joins the Dez Shatitar and flows into the Shatt-al-Arab. Vegetation occurs in the valley. Tribals like the Bakhteyari and the Qashguui migrate seasonally between the upper land and low land.

The Khuzestan plain in the south west, though enjoys little rainfall, is watered by numerous rivers including the Zohrek, Karkheh, Dez and Karun. Irrigation schemes are turning this region into an important agricultural area. Cotton is the main industrial crop which is grown in Gurgan and Azerbaijan. This region is not only rich in food crops but also in mineral resources, i.e., oil, copper, molybdenum, and other precious metals. 16

The northern highland is constituted by Alburz and Talish system. On the northern side many torrential streams flow to the low lands below. The Caspian coast is as much as 40 kms. and sometimes as little as 3 kms. wide. The northern slope is covered with deciduous forest. Ample rains help the cultivation of a variety of crops which includes tea, tobacco, cotton and citrus fruits. The

Alburz has numerous peaks rising about 3900 mt. but which declines in height to the east. The major rivers flowing into the Caspian are the Sefid Rud, The Haraz, The Gurgan, and the Atrak.

The north-eastern highland enjoys heavy rainfall and subtropical climate which makes the economic condition of the people little easier in comparison to other north east and eastern portions of Iran. Tehran the capital of Iran is located on the southern part of the Northern highland.

Many of the major towns and cities of the country, including Esfahan and Kerman are located on the central plateau fed by the rivers and the seasonal streams. These settlement have often been likened to an oasis. The two great deserts, Dasht-i-Kavir and Dasht-i-Lut occupy the eastern and south eastern parts of the plateau. The deserts are largely uninhabited wastes. Human settlement has tended to occur in a ring along the southern and western edge of the Kavir.

18. Ibid, p. 29.
The interior area experiences only low amounts of rainfall with an average between 26 mm. and 154 mm. annually. Its incidence is sharply confined to the six winter months.\(^\text{19}\)

The whole of interior desert basins is rich with iron ore, gold and lead. Oil is seen on the southern part of this basin. Agriculturally this area can be called the area of restrictive farming. This is the only geographical region where the tribal people are not seen with their Khans. This may be due to the flat topography which does not attract the mountain warriors. Because the mountain warriors move with their herds in search of grazing grasses which is not found in this area.

In marked contrast to north west, where the highland is wide and extremely regular in structural pattern, the east and south east Iran consist of a number of upland masses separated by almost basin like formations of differing width and varied altitude. Some of them resemble the basins. Their minimum altitude is 900 m. above sea level. It is convenient in the present instance to define eastern Iran as beginning of the water shed between the Gurgan and Atrek rivers, from where it extends upto the border of

\(19.\) Ibid, p. 91.
Sistan basin, to the west till the main Zagros. This region extends over 1288 kms north to south, and horizontally extends from east to west as little as 96.6 kms to an average of about 322 kms. The conditions are inhospitable which results in a sparse nomadic population. To its east lies the desolate Sistan basin at the terminus of Helmand River and south of it the frontier railroad town of Zahedan next to Pakistan. The low intensity of rainfall and the rugged terrain have effectively isolated human movement in this region. Though big city like Khorassan, Meshhad and Sistan exist since historical times.

The Helmand basin offers a cogenial place to the aboriginals of that area. In winter they cultivate quite a good deal of cereals, some beans and fodder crops, cloves and Lucerne. In summer they grow sorghum, vegetables and cotton. Lead and oil are the important minerals seen in this region but they are not exploited commercially, probably due to lack of necessary transport linkages and the lack of full knowledge about the quality and quantity of these minerals. Baluch who are the important tribes live in Makran basin on the extreme south east border of Iran adjoining Pakistan.

Iran situated in south west of Asia was popularly known as Pars (Persia) but in 1936 A.D. it was metamorphosed into Iran. Among the south west Asian countries it is the second largest in area, after Saudi Arabia. The geographical extent of this country is approximately from 25° to 40° north latitude and 44° to 63° east longitude. The country is surrounded by USSR and Caspian Sea in the north, Afghanistan and Pakistan in the east while Iraq and Turkey border it in the west.

According to the 1976 census, the total population of the country is 31.2 millions (as per recent estimate the total population is about 38 millions) and the density is 19 persons per sq. km. Tehran is the capital of the country. Iran having an area of 2.62 million square kms comprises, 1/25 of that of Asian continent or more than double the size of the Turkey and five times that of Great Britain. Its horizontal extension from east to west is about 2200 kms and from north to south it is 1413 kms approximately. The country has natural boundaries of mountain ranges of Khurassan and Elburz in the north and Hindukush and Suleiman in the north east and east, respectively. The Zagros and hills of Kurdistan in the west and the coastal hills of the Persian Gulf are prominent, and within this mountain frame, there lies the desert depression.
The deserts of Dasht-i-Kavīf and Dasht-i-Lut cover 1/3 of the total area of the country. The idea of the importance of the plateau could be gathered by the fact of locations of the most of Iranian cities at the height of 1200 to 900 m. The city of Hamadan (1820 m.), Kermanshah (1630 m.), Shiraz (1600 m.), Esfahan (1430 m.) and city of Tabriz 1400 m. The Iranian Plateau is flat with the centre elevated. It is highly uneven in nature and one comes across mountain ranges even within the plateau region which make it highly inaccessible.

The idea of its inaccessibility could be gathered by seeing the circulation of zig-zag roads connecting these urban centres. The city of Shiraz which is located 500 kms away from Esfahan is joined by a circular road of about 800 kms. Another example of inaccessibility is the road connecting Tehran to the city of Kermanshah. It follows the zig-zag margins of the Zagros mountain and it takes a long time to cover the small distance between them. In 1910 Claude Antez gave a clear picture of inaccessibility in Iran. He said that the journey from Tehran to the Caspian littorals is a hard one and it is very difficult even for adventurer to cross the Iranian plateau. Due to this it has vulnerable location of the Central Plateau and the geographical unit surrounded by civilisation. The
whirlwind effects on its civilisation and the advent of various invaders are seen historically on the fringe of Iran. The movement was only possible through north or south west and south east. The interior plateau did not allow civilisation or intruders to march in due to its determinant geographical condition existing through the ages.

The arid climatic conditions, uneven distribution of land, mountainous soil, lack of water and the highly wind eroded barren tracts hindered migration towards the Central Plateau of Iran. The major axis of movement was along the Caspian littoral from west to east via Bactria and ancient Ecbatana (now Hamadan). This continuity of human migration on the periphery from north east to north west has resulted in a composite religion, a composite culture and socio-economic advancements, thus making this region culturally and socially much more advanced than the Iranian plateau. It was because these peripheral areas had interacted with the civilisations of Mesopotamia, China and Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa. On the other hand the Central Plateau was unable to attract the major axis of human migration due to hostile physical conditions i.e., deserts, plateaus arid climate, soil erosion. At present also one will find the region thinly populated with minimum economic activities, maintaining still this geographical unit an isolated region of Iran.
Through the ages Iran has had a turbulent history. The stresses and strains continued on Iranian polity. Many a times the history of Iran revealed the inter and intra personal fights between the Khans, chieftains and the emperors. The dynasties were of such a momentary in nature that they appeared on the dawn and disappeared at dust. This disturbed and unstable history is having a tremendous amount of psychological impact on the inhabitants of Iran. 22

The boundaries of Iran are surrounded by the USSR, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iraq and Turkey. Unfortunately all these countries do not have political neutrality. Somehow or other they are influenced by the power politics. Iran has only one outlet that is towards the Persian Gulf, where the USA has established her naval bases threatening the neutrality of Iran. The borders of Iran are critically located. Border disputes may give rise to a war any moment. Many of its border disputes are yet to be solved. 23

Iran's strategic location is realised seriously when oil is commercialised. The power rivalry continued to put claims on the oil reserve and gained concession in 1920's

23. For border disputes please refer to Chapter II.
and 1930's. Initially, the rivalry was between the British and the Russians. Later on British imperialist domination was replaced by American imperialism. The Persian Gulf became the area and the pivot for the power rivalry between the USA and the nationalist of Iran.

Thus from the ancient times to the present, the geo-strategic importance of Iran is being maintained. It is the location of Iran which has influenced the space relationship of Iran within the context of the West Asian region, which has recently emerged as a significant zone of conflicting power systems dominating the contemporary world order.